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NSF CREATES NEW EDUCATION AND HUMAN RESOURCES DIRECTORATE

Throughout his tenure as director of the National Science Foundation (NSF), Erich Bloch has touted "education and human resources" as a major justification for increasing NSF funding. Now, with two months to go in office, Bloch has decided to reorganize the foundation's science and engineering education efforts by creating a new Education and Human Resources Directorate (EHR). The new directorate will be headed by current NSF Senior Science Advisor Luther Williams.

The old Science and Engineering Education Directorate (SEE) and its assistant director, Bassam Shakashiri, are gone. Shakashiri will join the NSF Director's office.

The new EHR will include all the programs of the SEE Directorate as well as the NSF programs to promote science and engineering opportunities for women and minorities and persons with disabilities, which are currently housed in the Scientific, Technological, and International Affairs Directorate (STIA). It will also have responsibility for coordinating undergraduate education efforts managed currently by the disciplinary research programs.

Pushed by Congress for years to consolidate and better coordinate NSF’s endeavors in science education, Bloch is also responding to some of the recommendations made in an Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) report, "Science Education: From Grade School to Grad School." The OTA report is often cited by NSF Senate appropriations chair Barbara Mikulski (D-MD).

The National Science Board approved the reorganization at its May meeting. The House Science, Research and Technology Subcommittee will use an already scheduled hearing on June 7th to examine these changes in detail.

SENATE DEBATES SOCIAL SCIENCE, RACE, AND DEATH PENALTY

Research on racial discrimination in death penalty sentencing is more likely to sway legislators than judges, according to Federal Appeal Court Judge Abner Mikva. Speaking at a recent luncheon sponsored by the Association of American Law Schools, Mikva, a former congressman, pointed to the Supreme Court's McCleskey v. Kemp decision, which rejected research by University of Iowa professor David Baldus as grounds for overturning death penalty sentences. Baldus's research reveals a discriminatory pattern of death penalty sentencing in the United States.

On May 24, however, federal legislators showed themselves equally unwilling to use social science research in death penalty lawmaking. After a passionate debate of more than two hours, senators voted 58-38 to reject the use of social science evidence to invalidate racially discriminatory death penalty laws.

The Racial Justice Act, sponsored by Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-MA) would have prohibited the imposition or implementation of a state or federal death sentence if that sentence furthered a "racially disproportionate pattern." The act, according to Kennedy, would have allowed defendants to chal-

Inside Update...
- Panel Probes HUD Data Availability and Usefulness
- NIMH Council Examines Social and Behavioral Research
- Committee Considers Plight of Elderly Women
- Researchers Advocate New Education Institutes
- Army Programs Support Social and Behavioral Science Research
Challenging their sentences by statistically demonstrating the existence of a racially discriminatory sentencing pattern. The legislation would have recognized such a pattern in either the race of defendants or the race of victims.

If a defendant revealed a racially disproportionate pattern, the act would have required government prosecutors to demonstrate that racial disparities were not the result of discrimination. If the government failed to provide such evidence, the death sentence would be vacated.

Kennedy's legislation was incorporated in the Omnibus Crime Act of 1990. When the bill came to the floor for debate, however, Sen. Bob Graham (D-FL) moved to strike the Kennedy provision.

During the floor debate, Kennedy based his argument on a General Accounting Office (GAO) report that evaluated 28 social science studies of death penalty sentencing. GAO concluded that a "synthesis of the 28 studies shows a pattern of evidence indicating racial disparities in the charging, sentencing, and imposition of the death penalty after the Furman [vs. Georgia 1972 Supreme Court] decision."

According to GAO, social science research reveals that the race of a murder victim is very influential in death penalty sentencing. "In 82 percent of the studies," GAO noted, "race of victim was found to influence the likelihood of being charged with capital murder or receiving the death penalty, i.e. those who murdered whites were found to be more likely to be sentenced to death than those who murdered blacks ... The evidence of race of victim influence was stronger for the earlier stages of the judicial process (e.g. prosecutorial decision to charge defendant with a capital offense, decision to proceed to trial rather than plea bargain) than in later stages."

While supporting the existence of a race of victim effect, GAO was less convinced by evidence suggesting a race of defendant effect. "The evidence for the influence of race of defendant on death penalty outcomes was equivocal," the GAO report said.

Kennedy Finds Supporters

In arguing for his provision, Kennedy found an ally in Sen. Bill Bradley (D-NJ), a death penalty supporter. The New Jersey Supreme Court, Bradley told his colleagues, has begun to collect data on death penalty race discrimination. The court, he said, has appointed David Baldus as special master to develop a public data file. Bradley noted the "difficulties involved in governing in a society where the court system is perceived to be unfair or racist, by a significant part of the population."

Sen. Brock Adams (D-WA), a death penalty supporter and former prosecutor, also spoke on behalf of Kennedy's bill. He was joined by Sen. Joseph Biden (D-DE), chairman of the Judiciary Committee and sponsor of the omnibus crime bill, and Sens. Howard Metzenbaum (D-OH) and Carl Levin (D-MI).

Thurmond Decries "Quotas"

Opponents described Kennedy's proposal as a thinly veiled attempt to abolish the death penalty altogether. Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-SC), ranking Republican on the Judiciary Committee, claimed that enactment of the Racial Justice Act would impose quotas on who could be put to death. "It would impose statistical quotas for both victims and killers," he said, "thereby dispensing justice by mathematical computation based upon statistics from other cases, rather than by a jury in a particular case. Computers doing computations should not determine the punishment of an individual who has committed a ruthless crime."
Thurmond’s view was echoed by Sens. Jesse Helms (R-NC), Gordon Humphrey (R-NH), Charles Grassley (R-IA) and Orrin Hatch (R-UT). Opponents attacked the validity of the Baldus study and other social science research. Hatch offered a particularly harsh assessment of the legislation. "It attempts, basically, to enact into law the findings of the poorly regarded study by Prof. David Baldus," he said.

Graham disputed the usefulness of social science research in criminal policy decisions. "The very nature of the criminal justice process," he said, "does not lend itself to such statistical analysis. Every death eligible decision is inherently individualized and not necessarily subject to being categorized." Graham’s argument found support from Sen. Arlen Specter (R-PA), who voted for the act in the Judiciary Committee but opposed it on the floor.

PANEL PROBES HUD DATA AVAILABILITY AND USEFULNESS

"My discussion of HUD's data on housing and local housing markets is necessarily a story of limitations and compromises." Thus John Weicher, assistant secretary of Housing and Urban Development, summarized his testimony before a concerned House panel. Weicher, who heads HUD’s policy development and research (PDR) operations, spoke May 22 before the House Subcommittee on Policy Research and Insurance, chaired by Rep. Ben Erdreich (D-AL).

Many of HUD’s data limitations, Weicher said, stem from the department’s severe budget constraints. Noting that the PDR appropriation was $61 million in 1977 and only $17 million in 1989, Weicher argued for congressional tolerance in reviewing HUD’s problems with its information collection capability.

HUD continues to rely on data from the decennial census for much of its knowledge about the amount and quality of the American housing. Critics note that census data is easily outdated and insufficiently detailed on the subject of housing attributes. Recognizing these problems, HUD began in 1973 its Annual Housing Survey (AHS). The new survey was designed to produce more comprehensive data on changes in housing stock and housing demand.

In recent years, however, budget cuts have taken their toll on the survey. The original AHS sample was 60,000 housing units, visited annually from 1973 to 1981. In 1984, however, the AHS was renamed the American Housing Survey to reflect its new biennial status. In 1989 the sample was 50,000, up from 46,000 in 1985.

In 1974, the AHS began separate surveys of 60 large Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSAs) over a three-year rotation. Sample sizes were around 12,000 for 12 of the largest SMSAs and 5,000 for the other 48 SMSAs.

After 1978, however, the rotation was stretched to every four years. After 1984 only 44 SMSAs, with about one-half the nation’s households, were surveyed, and by 1986 sample sizes had dropped to 3,000 units.

Weicher discussed with subcommittee members the need for better data on assisted housing and households. The department, he acknowledged, lacks information on the location of all housing units that receive HUD subsidies. Weicher assured the subcommittee, however, that this gap is being filled.

HUD also seeks to integrate programs on housing and urban development with other domestic programs, according to Weicher. The department has developed a prototype Urban Data System, he said, which allows users to retrieve and analyze a wide variety of statistics on urban areas in the United States. The system has limitations, however, including a lack of information on individual suburban jurisdictions and on neighborhoods within cities or suburbs.

The administration’s FY 1991 budget proposes an extra $25 million for PDR. The increase is part of a 1 percent transfer of program funds (an idea borrowed from HHS) for an initiative to build in evaluation and monitoring before HUD implements programs. This transfer, HUD officials say, will prevent the sort of scandals that have plagued the department in recent years. Moreover, planned
improvements in data use are expected to improve the monitoring and evaluation of current programs.

Witnesses from the National Association of Realtors and the National Association of Home Builders advocated more attention to home financing data. They also called for enhanced use of longitudinal surveys. Steve Kennedy of ABT Associates supported better emerging trend data for forecasting, especially for local housing markets.

Margery Turner of the Urban Institute argued for better analyses of existing data on low income housing. John Frazier of Geo Demographics Ltd. demonstrated the usefulness of geographic information systems in making local housing policy decisions.

Chairman Erdreich expressed interest in the use of data to answer policy questions, such as where low cost housing is being built and who has access to it. Data can also be used to measure the impact of an aging society on housing needs and to explain why vouchers only work for some families in some areas. Erdreich was clearly supportive of HUD's efforts to improve its data collection efforts.

Koslow made quick reference to a report recently submitted to the Senate Appropriations Committee. The report, which the committee requested in FY 1990, stated:

"From FY 1984 through FY 1989, funding for research with a primary behavioral or social science focus has increased 106 percent. Including related research, whose central focus is not behavioral but which contains a behavioral or social science component, funding for behavioral and social science research has increased 119 percent over this period."

Data Koslow presented to the Council, however, offers a markedly different interpretation of the funding situation. The increases described to Congress fail to account for the overall growth in the NIMH budget.

Looking at funding for the behavioral and social sciences as a proportion of overall research expenditures reveals that direct support for these disciplines has remained fairly stable at less than 25 percent of the research budget.

Indirect support through related research has seen significant growth, but even these areas of research have not seen significant increases when compared to the overall research base.

Several council members, while impressed with the studies described by Koslow, expressed concern that the staff report did not address the fundamental role of the social and behavioral sciences in the institute's overall research agenda.

In response, NIMH Director Lewis Judd stressed that the behavioral and social sciences were indeed important to the institute and that this and other recent efforts to examine their status were stimulated by a desire "to make sure we're representing the very best."

The discussion concluded with a request that NIMH staff prepare a written report for discussion at a future Council meeting. Those Council members most receptive to social and behavioral science research supported this delaying tactic.
COMMITTEE CONSIDERS PLIGHT OF ELDERLY WOMEN

Social policy often lags behind social change. Critics of the social security system, for instance, say the program has not kept up with changes in the American family. According to witnesses at a recent congressional hearing, the victims of this lag are elderly women.

At a May 22 hearing before the House Select Committee on Aging, Rep. William J. Hughes (D-NJ) examined the problems inherent in both the social security and the private pension systems. Hughes chairs the aging committee's retirement income and employment subcommittee.

Drawing on data gathered by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, witnesses noted that nearly three-fourths of older Americans living below the poverty level are women.

Furthermore, the average Social Security benefit for men is $628 but only $459 for women. Despite increasing female participation in the labor force, predictions see no significant decrease in poverty among elderly women.

The roots of the problem, according to witnesses, are social security and pension systems that compound wage discrimination by limiting benefits for older women. Divorce, an aging population, and the tendency of most women to outlive their husbands further exacerbate the problem of female elderly poverty.

The social security system, according to Lou Glasse, president of the Older Women's League, best serves families that consist of a lifelong breadwinner, a lifelong homemaker, and children. This pattern fits less than 10 percent of current American families.

Most women drop out of the work force periodically in order to care for children, ill relatives, or elderly parents. Caregiving years become "zero years", in which no income is earned. They are averaged with earning years to arrive at the social security level - thereby diminishing eventual benefits. Moreover, under the current social security system a woman cannot receive dual entitlements owed to her for both work and childcare.

Two plans have been proposed to protect caregivers. The first would allow a certain number of caregiving years that would not be averaged as "zero years" in social security benefits.

The second plan would provide social security credits to caregivers. The American Association of Retired Persons has warned, however, that both plans need further study in order to avoid unintended negative outcomes.

A second area cited as needing reform is the private pension system. According to the Pension Rights Center, only 13.6 percent of women over 65 collect private pensions. Women are often excluded from company pension plans or suffer because they do not work at one place long enough to "vest" in the plan.

Recommendations of various witnesses included reducing vesting requirements to three years for all workers and encouraging the expansion of pensions to cover traditionally female work patterns, including part time workers and seasonal workers. Finally, some witnesses proposed pension "portability," which would allow workers to carry pension credits from one job to another.

Dr. Regina O'Grady-LeShane of the Boston College Graduate School of Social Work described to the committee her plan for earnings sharing. The concept has been introduced by Rep. Mary Rose Oakar (D-OH) as H.R. 203, the Earnings Sharing Bill. Under Oakar's legislation, earnings would be split equally between spouses for pension purposes.

Purdue University has joined the Consortium as a Contributing institution.

COSSA is pleased to announce that Purdue University has joined the Consortium as a Contributing institution.

COSSA also apologizes for omitting Johns Hopkins University from our most recent count of Contributors. The Consortium enjoys the support of 54 Contributors.
RESEARCHERS ADVOCATE NEW EDUCATION INSTITUTES

"We believe it is time to advocate a substantially revised federal education research structure." With that statement and support from the Council of the American Education Research Association (AERA), Arthur Wise and Gerald Sroufe issued their call for a "National Institutes for Educational Improvement" (NIER). The pair outlined their proposal in the May issue of Educational Researcher.

Claiming that "incremental change in the educational research structure will not do if America's leaders are seeking nonincremental change in schools," Wise, director of the RAND-sponsored Center for the Study of Teaching, and Sroufe, AERA's government and professional liaison director, urge major changes in the federal government's support for education research.

Congress and the research community should "begin to change the thinking about education research from a polyglot collection of activities designed 20 years ago to a problem-driven mission orientation," the researchers say. The upcoming reauthorization of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) provides the occasion for such a reevaluation.

Wise and Sroufe argue that OERI's current structure is not "accountable for achievements in education research because it operates with such an amorphous mandate and such limited resources." The General Accounting Office and others have documented the federal government's disinvestment in education research during the 1980s. Given the renewed emphasis on education reform, including the pronouncement of national education goals by President Bush and the nation's governors, it is time, Wise and Sroufe claim, to reorganize and reinvigorate the educational research effort.

Using the National Institutes of Health (NIH) as a model, Wise and Sroufe advocate institutes for education research that "could help crystallize thinking about the needs of our schools and could help us create a knowledge base sufficient to resolve problems that are presently regarded as intractable."

The NIER's missions could be derived from the six pronounced national education goals. An alternative might be to combine the already existing educational research centers and those to be competed in 1990 into national institutes with bigger budgets and larger missions.

Enlarging the resources available to an NIER would be difficult in an era of budgetary problems. Many people and groups, including COSSA, have endorsed the idea of spending $230 million, 1 percent of national education spending, on research. If appropriated, Wise and Sroufe indicate, this amount would allow five institutes funded at about $50 million each, with at least 15 percent of the funds set-aside for field-initiated studies in each institute.

Currently there are or will be 25 national education research centers funded at about $1 million each and field-initiated studies funded at about $1 million.

Education researchers thus join environmental researchers (see UPDATE April 6, 1990) in attempting to restructure the way the federal government supports its research endeavors, with both groups using the NIH as a model.

Congress has generally treated education research results with disdain and as an afterthought during the appropriations process. Small increases that have been granted in recent years have focused almost entirely on enhancing the national centers. Field initiated research is generally ignored. Whether restructuring would accomplish the goals of a mission-oriented, adequately funded education research enterprise should be the subject of many discussions over the next year.

ARMY PROGRAMS SUPPORT SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

UPDATE's series on Defense Department research continues with a look at Army-sponsored research in the social and behavioral sciences. COSSA encourages interested readers to contact the relevant program managers for detailed information and application materials.
The basic research program at the Army Research Institute (ARI) seeks to develop a behavioral science foundation for applied research on the effectiveness of Army systems and soldiers. While intended to support basic research, the program primarily funds research relevant to applied development. "While it is expected that the research will provide original contributions advancing the corpus of science, investigations of problems that can be related to Army concerns are desirable," according to ARI publications.

ARI currently funds approximately $3.4 million in basic research contracts. Contracts range from one to five years, with a typical agreement spanning three years at $140,000 per year. The large number of continuing contracts, coupled with a shrinking budget, greatly limit the resources available for new contracts.

The Office of Basic Research develops ARI's broad research priorities. Interested scientists are asked to submit preliminary concept papers of three to five pages. After reviewing the papers, the office asks promising applicants to develop full proposals. All proposals and concept papers are subject to scientific peer review, and final recommendations are made by the relevant program managers and technical directors. The most recently defined research areas are as follows:

Learning, Cognition, and Problem Solving - Dr. Judith Orasanu, Phone: (202) 274-5590

This program supports research on the acquisition of advanced concepts and complex knowledge. Projects should emphasize factors that generate long-term retention and foster use of knowledge in novel situations. Research can include computer modeling of knowledge and knowledge access.

Human Performance and Naturalistic Decision Dynamics - Dr. Michael Drillings, Phone: (202) 274-5572

Research under this program seeks to foster an understanding of individual decision-making in response to changing conditions. Research topics include the contribution of high workload, and chronopsychological and other factors to human error; human error prediction and accident prevention; and the influence of stress on cognitive performance and group performance. The program seeks a scientific basis for models of interaction between human operators and systems, including software and computer devices.

Group Functioning and Communicative Processes - Dr. Judith Orasanu, Phone: (202) 274-5590; Dr. Michael Drillings, Phone: (202) 274-5572

This program supports research on the behavioral elements of interpersonal and intragroup communication. The program also funds research on design principals and variables that contribute to reliability in organizations functioning in uncertain environments. Research is needed to develop models that characterize and quantify group performance, especially in crisis situations.

ARMY HUMAN ENGINEERING LAB

Behavioral Research Division - Major James M. King, division chief, SLCHE/BR, Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD 21005-5001. Phone: (301) 278-5982

The Army Human Engineering Lab funds limited research on soldier performance. The lab has an annual research budget of approximately $3 million, but only a small portion is devoted to basic research. While the lab conducts most research in-house, it awards some extramural contracts.

Research focuses on better understanding of sensory cues and neural processing. Specific topics include individual soldier performance, auditory performance, visual performance, information processing performance, ergonometric modeling, and the development of evaluation techniques.
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